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By Herman Schleuter



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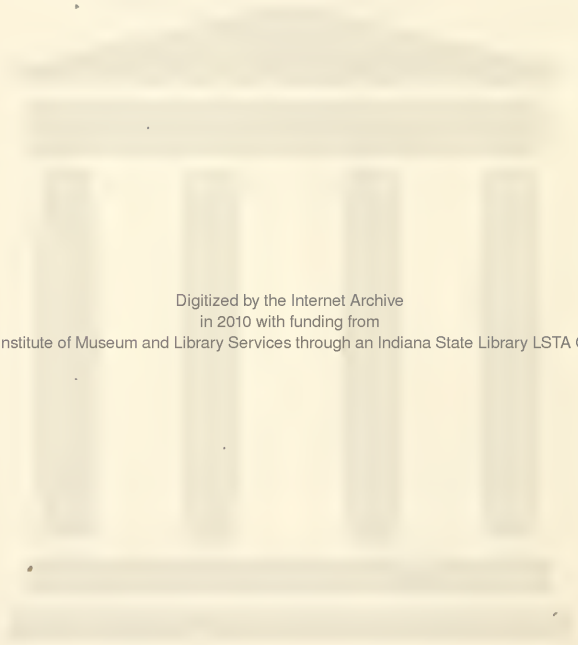
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ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE WORKING CLASS.

1. THE ENGLISH WORKINGMEN AND THE CIVIL WAR.

Of the European countries, it was especially England that was affected by the outbreak of the Civil War. As we have seen, England was connected with the Southern States by a bond of common interests. Its textile industry, which had reached its highest development towards the close of the fifties, needed the raw cotton of the cultivation of which the Southern States possessed a monopoly. The latter, owing to the institution of slavery, were interested in the importation of English products free of duty, while the young manufacturing industry of the North favored a protective policy which found actual expression in the national tariff laws. It was consequently in the interest of the English middle class that the Southern States should form an independent confederacy with tariff regulations of its own which should grant England undisturbed free trade. Under such an arrangement the South could supply England with the raw cotton which was so necessary to it, and English manufacturers could export their industrial products of all kinds to the Southern States, free of duty, and without fear of competition. Under the pressure of

these interests the early Abolitionist impulses of the ruling class in England disappeared, and English intervention in favor of the Southern States was advocated in these circles.

Besides England, France also was interested in the events taking place in the United States. Textile industry was of course far less developed in the Second Empire than in Great Britain, and cotton did not play as important a role in French politics as in English. Nevertheless, French textile workers were also affected by the scarcity of cotton and suffered severely from the crisis produced thereby. But although their distress was due to the War of Secession, like their English comrades they stood by the Union and opposed Negro slavery, and by no means shared their ruler's bias in favor of the Southern slaveholders. On the contrary, they took a very decided stand against them.

It was, however, not the part which the cotton famine and all it involved played in France that drove the French Emperor to sympathize with the South. Louis Napoleon was filled with the lust of conquest and aggrandizement. He had designs upon Mexico that could scarcely be realized if the United States remained intact, and for this reason he sided with the Southern States. He would gladly have made the attempt to break the blockade of the Southern ports proclaimed by the Washington Government, and he would even have directly intervened in favor of the South, had he not feared thereby to involve France in conflicts of far-reaching consequences. For

this reason, he desired the co-operation of England in this enterprise, and he did his best to obtain it.

In England the government was far more dependent on public opinion than in France. If public opinion in Great Britain had really demanded the recognition of the Southern Confederacy, if it had demanded active intervention in its favor, the Government would only too willingly have obeyed the pressure. But in the face of the public opinion emphatically opposed to all intervention on the part of England in the affairs of America, the Government dared not pursue a contrary course. The decision consequently lay with England.

Only a few years had passed since England, on the occasion of the visit of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the book which graphically described the sufferings of Negro slaves, melted in sentimental approval, especially since the author was the honored guest in the most exclusive circles of the English nobility. After the outbreak of the Civil War not a trace of this sentiment remained in the hearts of the English middle class. "Today [1862] we find only here and there one among the Englishmen who does not fanatically side with the slave States, and that one probably has not the courage to express his opinions"* This was true as far as the

*Lothar Bucher: *Die Londoner Industrieausstellung von 1862*. Berlin, 1863, p. 155. Bucher evidently considered only the ruling class as "Englishmen."

ruling classes were concerned, and they indeed tried their best to persuade the Government to intervene in behalf of the South. They arranged labor demonstrations and meetings declaring in favor of the South and of open hostilities against the North for the purpose of showing that these sentiments had the backing of English "public opinion." But under the influence of persons, many of whom subsequently belonged to the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, the workingmen of England offered the most determined opposition to the attempt of forcing them into demonstrations favoring the slaveholders. English workingmen had themselves become only too well acquainted with slavery to espouse its support in one of its most aggravated forms.

The manufacturers now resorted to intimidation to compel the workingmen to join in the cry for war. Starvation, that ever ready weapon in the hands of the middle class, was to force the workingmen of England to declare for slavery in America and thereby enable the Government to say that public opinion demanded its hostile intervention in behalf of the South. The Civil War, and especially the blockade of the southern ports by Northern forces, had created a scarcity of cotton in England which, by the way, was not altogether unwelcome to the manufacturers. For there had been an overproduction in the cotton industry of England in 1860. "Its effects were still felt during the years immediately following. . . . The demand for labor had in con-

sequence already been decreased here [in Blackburn, where in 1860 there were 30,000 mechanical looms], months before the effects of the cotton blockade made themselves felt. . . . The stock on hand [of the manufacturers] of course rose in price as long as it lasted, and the alarming depreciation which ordinarily inevitably accompanies such crises was thus avoided."*

A temporary closing of factories thus sent up the prices of the accumulated commodities, a situation by no means deprecated by the cotton lords, especially since they cherished the hope that starvation would speedily cause the workingmen to adopt the views of the manufacturers in regard to the Civil War in America. So the textile factories in the north of England were shut down. More than half of the looms and spindles were idle. The wages of the spinners and weavers who continued to be employed were artificially and forcibly reduced in a manner which literally led to starvation. The manufacturers deliberately increased the misery into which the workingmen had been thrown by the scarcity of cotton, hoping thus to drive them to despair and to demand the Government's intervention in the American troubles. For, as the middle-class organs declared, the intervention of England would put an end to their misery.

And this misery of the workingmen, especially in the textile districts of Lancashire, was

**Report on Factories*. October, 1862, pp. 28-29. Quoted by Karl Marx: *Kapital*, III., 1, p. 106.

indeed alarming. In 1863, when conditions had already somewhat improved, the weekly wages of weavers and spinners amounted to 3s. 4d. and 5s. 1d. Despite this low rate, these wages were still further reduced, particularly by fines. In 1862 weavers' wages ranged from 2s. 6d per week up.

"No wonder that, in some parts of Lancashire, a kind of famine fever broke out.* . . . But the working-people had to suffer not only from the experiments of the manufacturers inside the mills, and of the municipalities outside; not only from reduced wages and absence of work, from want and from charity, and from the eulogistic speeches of Lords and Commons. Unfortunate females who, in consequence of the cotton famine, were at its commencement thrown out of employment, and have thereby become outcasts of society, and now, though trade has revived and work is plentiful, continue members of that unfortunate class, and are likely to continue so. There are also in the borough more youthful prostitutes than I have known for the last 25 years."*

The workingmen of England were starving with exemplary patience. They saw their daughters drift into a life of shame while hunger-typhus decimated their own ranks, but they would not yield to the demands of the brutal factory lords. Not only did they refuse

*Marx: *Capital*, I., p. 283.

**Report on Factories*. October 31, 1865. Quoted by Marx: *Capital*, I., p. 283.

to fall into line with the wishes of their masters and declare themselves in favor of the South, but on the contrary they declared themselves as distinctly against such a policy. The workingmen of England never had better leaders than at this period, and on these leaders' advice they espoused the cause of the abolition of Negro slavery and protested against the intervention of the Government in favor of the South.

Hardly had Lincoln, after more than a year of cautious dealing with the slavery question, intimated that the War of Secession might be transformed into a war of Negro emancipation, than the workingmen of England, in hundreds of public meetings all over the country, in all industrial sections and large cities, hailed this move with enthusiasm and demanded the initiation of energetic measures against slavery and the slaveholders. In vain were the sneers with which the English ruling class commented on the early defeats of the Union army, in vain was the hypocritical attitude of Gladstone and his colleagues in the Government who sought to disguise their secret desire for intervention by the declaration that the Union could never suppress the Rebellion and that the Civil War meant only useless and aimless bloodshed. Cheerfully, even enthusiastically, the English workingmen bore starvation and misery, and protested more and more loudly against Negro slavery and against the intervention of their Government in favor of the Southern rebels.

In the north of the country, in the cotton

districts, where the manufacturers attempted to coerce their employees by starvation, one of the active agitators in favor of the Union was Ernest Jones, the champion and poet of the Chartist movement. His eloquence was irresistible, and his speeches against the slaveholders were so impressive that the towns of Ashton and Rockdale had them printed and circulated at their own expense. When Jones, before a crowded mass meeting at Blackburn, surrounded by the hostile local manufacturers on the platform, exclaimed, "Why did the South secede?" one of the latter replied, "For free trade," whereupon the speaker instantly retorted, "Free trade in what? Free trade in the lash—free trade in the branding iron—free trade in chains."*

The applause which broke forth from the assembled workingmen need not be described. The glowing eloquence of Jones contributed its share in inspiring the starving textile workers of Lancashire to persist in their position.

Let us compare now with the heroism of the workingmen of England the contemptible hypocrisy of the middle class and its leaders. The same Gladstone who declared the attempts of the North to suppress the rebellion of the slaveholders to be futile, and who only waited for an opportunity to bring about an intervention of England in favor of the Southern States, this same Gladstone declared in a speech that the whole history of the Christian

*Frederick Leary: *Ernest Jones*. London, 1887, p. 72.

church could not furnish so brilliant an example of Christian resignation as that of the workingmen of Lancashire.[†] Of course, this "Christian resignation" and the exemplary patience of these workingmen were easily explained. Mr. Gladstone himself would have them, had they become impatient, imprisoned and shot to pieces amid the applause of the manufacturers, who were responsible for all the misery.

In New York a committee was formed for the purpose of collecting money for the starving spinners and weavers in the north of England and thus alleviating their misery. The "suffering factory workers" of Blackburn addressed a letter to this committee and "to the inhabitants of the United States" beseeching them to furnish the means for their emigration to the United States. But the starving workingmen of the north of England were of far greater use to the Northern capitalists by remaining where they were and continuing to starve and heroically to protest against the machinations of their masters than by coming to the United States. So money was indeed sent to relieve their immediate distress, but Brother Jonathan lent a deaf ear to their entreaties for emigration on a large scale.

The workingmen of England could count even less upon the encouragement of the ruling class of their own country in their plans for emigration. The great mass of the textile

[†]Bucher, pp. 156-57.

workers was indeed without employment at the time, but the manufacturers desired to retain the skilled laborers until they should need them again. On March 24, 1863, a manufacturer declared in the London Times:

"Encourage or allow the working-power to emigrate, and what of the capitalists? . . . Take away the cream of the workers, and fixed capital will depreciate in a great degree, and the floating will not subject itself to a struggle with the short supply of inferior labor. . . . We are told the workers wish it [emigration]. Very natural it is that they should do so. . . . Reduce, compress the cotton trade by taking away its working-power and reducing their wages expenditure, say one fifth, or five millions, and what then would happen to the class above, the small store-keepers, and what of the rents—the cottage rents? . . . Trace out the effects upward to the small farmer, the better householder, and . . . the land-owner, and say if there could be any suggestion more suicidal, to all classes of the country, than by enfeebling a nation by exporting the best of its manufacturing population, and destroying the value of some of its most productive capital and enrichment"*

The manufacturers' cry of despair found willing ears. The emigration of the workingmen was prevented. "Parliament did not vote a single farthing in aid of emigration, but simply passed some acts empowering the municipal

*Marx: *Capital*, I., pp. 362-363.

corporations to keep the operatives in a half-starved state—i. e., to exploit them at less than the normal wages.”*

The municipalities ordered public works. The unemployed were set to work on drainage, roads, stone cutting, paving, etc., and drew relief from the local authorities. This action virtually amounted to a relief of the manufacturers, whose skilled hands were kept in the country. Thus “the manufacturer, in secret understanding with the Government, prevented emigration as far as possible, partly in order to have instantly available their capital which consisted in the flesh and blood of these workmen, and partly in order to be sure of the rent which these workmen paid them.”†

Many of the manufacturers owned the houses in which the workingmen employed by them were living. Rent could not be paid during the time there was no work. The unpaid rent would have been a pure loss if the workingmen had succeeded in realizing their plan for emigration. Another reason which induced the manufacturers to oppose the scheme with all the means at their disposal was the fact that it offered the workingmen an opportunity to escape from their wretched conditions.

The heroic attitude of the textile workers of England during the Civil War in America constitutes one of the most glorious pages in the history of the working class and must there-

*Marx: *Capital*, I., p. 364.

†Marx: *Kapital*, III., I., pp. 111-115.

fore be emphasized here. They suffered, starved and even died for the cause of Negro emancipation in America. And yet a little less patience would in this case have made the workingmen even more heroic. But the spirit of the Chartists had passed, and the workingmen of England were now great only in passive resistance. The perfidy of the ruling class never challenged instant active resistance more than did the conduct of the English manufacturers and the English government at the time of the Civil War.

The meetings protesting against a war in favor of the Southern States had in the meantime been continued. It was especially during the late winter of 1862 and of 1863 that one such meeting followed another. Above all others the workingmen of London began to be aroused. The trade unions of the metropolis called a meeting at St. James Hall for March 26th, which was of special importance, and the declarations of which were recognized as the expression of English working class opinion. At this meeting a prominent part was played by W. R. Cremer, then a cabinet-maker, subsequently a member of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, and still later one of the champions of the international peace movement. John Bright was in the chair, and among the speakers were John Stuart Mill and Prof. E. S. Beesly. In an address to Abraham Lincoln which was drawn up by this monster meeting this passage occurs:

"Though we have felt proud of our country

... yet have we ever turned with glowing admiration to your great Republic, where a higher political and social freedom has been established."

And John Bright declared:

"I am persuaded that the more perfect the friendship that is established between the people of England and the free people of America, the more you will find your path of progress here made easy for you, and the more will social and political liberty advance among us."*

Lord Palmerston, then at the head of the English Government, was about to declare war against the Union. According to the testimony of Karl Marx it was this monster meeting of the English trade unions, together with the general attitude of the English working class in the matter, that prevented him from carrying out his intention. The Northern States of America have to thank the working class of England that at that trying period in their conflict with the South they were not involved in an additional war with England, and perhaps also with France, which would have seriously imperilled the existence of the Union.

*Henry Bryan Binns: *Abraham Lincoln*. London, 1907.

2. ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE WORKINGMEN OF ENGLAND.

Near the end of September, 1862, Lincoln issued a proclamation to the effect that on January 1, 1863, he would declare free all slaves in those States which should then be in rebellion against the United States and refuse to lay down their arms.

It was natural for the ruling classes of the South to ignore this proclamation. The Southern States had been enabled to maintain a few good privateers for injuring Northern Commerce, aided and encouraged therein mainly by England, its nobility, shipbuilders and merchants, with the Government's tacit approval. The slave-holders had every reason to expect that the English ruling classes would lend the Confederacy still further assistance.

But as we have seen, the English working class put in its veto here. The proclamation by Lincoln of his intention to abolish slavery by January 1st called forth great rejoicing; and although there was heard here and there a note of disappointment because the abolition of slavery was put forth as a war measure and not as an unconditional condemnation of slavery on principle, great demonstrations of workingmen took place, alike in the north and the south of England. In meetings at London and at Manchester it was resolved to send an address to President Lincoln expressing the thanks of the English workingmen for

the Emancipation Proclamation and encouraging him in taking still more decisive steps. Both meetings took place December 31, 1862.

The address adopted by the London meeting read as follows:

"The Workingmen of London to the President of the United States of America.

"To His Excellency, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America.

"Sir: We who offer this address are Englishmen and workingmen. We prize as our dearest inheritance, bought for us by the blood of our fathers, the liberty we enjoy—the liberty of free labor on the free soil. We have, therefore, been accustomed to regard with veneration and gratitude the founders of the great republic in which the liberties of the Anglo-Saxon race have been widened beyond all the precedents of the old world, and in which there was nothing to condemn or to lament but the slavery and degradation of men guilty only of a colored skin or an African parentage. We have looked with admiration and sympathy upon the brave, generous and untiring efforts or a large party in the Northern States to deliver the Union from this curse and shame. We rejoiced, sir, in your election to the Presidency, as a splendid proof that the principles of universal freedom and equality were arising to the ascendant. We regarded with abhorrence the conspiracy and rebellion by which it was sought at once to overthrow the su-

premacY of a government based upon the most popular suffrage in the world, and to perpetuate the hateful inequalities of race. We have ever heard with indignation the slander that ascribed to England sympathy with a rebellion of slaveholders, and all proposals to recognize in friendship a confederacy that boasts of slavery as its cornerstone. We have watched with the warmest interest the steady advance of your policy along the path of emancipation; and on this eve of the day on which your proclamation of freedom takes effect, we pray God to strengthen your hands, to confirm your noble purpose, and to hasten the restoration of that lawful authority which engages, in peace or war, by compensation or by force of arm, to realize the glorious principle on which your constitution is founded—the brotherhood, freedom, and equality of all men.”*

On the same day when the workingmen of London in mass meeting assembled framed the above address, the workingmen of Manchester held a meeting for the same purpose. No less than 6,000 persons were present in the hall, the largest of the city. The address adopted here was sent by the Mayor of Manchester by special messenger to the American Minister at London, Charles Francis Adams. The importance which the American Minister attached to this manifestation of the workingmen may be gathered from the letter with which he forwarded the address to Secretary

**Senate Documents.* Washington, 1863.

of State Seward, in Washington. This letter declared:

"This meeting is in every respect a most remarkable indication of the state of popular sentiment in Great Britain. It will doubtless make a strong impression elsewhere, and, if duly followed up, may have the effect of restoring, in a degree, the amicable feeling between the two countries."*

The address, whose significance was truly set forth by this letter of the minister, read as follows:

"Address to the Workingmen of Manchester
to His Excellency,

"Abraham Lincoln, President of the United
States of America.

"As citizens of Manchester, assembled at the Free Trade Hall, we beg to express our fraternal sentiments towards you and your country.

"We rejoice in your greatness, as an outgrowth of England, whose blood and language you share, whose orderly and legal freedom you have applied to new circumstances, over a region immeasurably greater than our own. We honor your free States as a singularly happy abode for the working millions where industry is honored. One thing alone has, in the past, lessened our sympathy with your country and our confidence in it; we mean

**Senate Documents.* Washington, 1863.

the ascendancy of politicians who not merely maintained Negro slavery, but desired to extend and root it more deeply. Since we have discerned, however, that the victory of the free North in the war which has so sorely distressed us as well as afflicted you, will shake off the fetters of the slave, you have attracted our warm and earnest sympathy.

"We joyfully honor you, as the President, and the Congress with you, for the many decisive steps towards practically exemplifying your belief in the words of your great founders: 'All men are created free and equal.'

"You have procured the liberation of the slaves in the district around Washington, and thereby made the centre of your federation visibly free. You have enforced the laws against the slave trade and kept up your fleet against it, even while every ship was wanted for service in your terrible war. You have nobly decided to receive ambassadors from the Negro republics of Hayti and Liberia, thus forever removing that unworthy prejudice which refuses the rights of humanity to men and women on account of their color. In order more effectually to stop the slave trade, you have made with our Queen a treaty, which your Senate has ratified, for the right of mutual search. Your Congress has decreed freedom as the law forever in the vast unoccupied or half-settled territories which are directly subject to its legislative power. It has offered pecuniary aid to all the States which will enact emancipation locally, and has forbidden your generals to restore fugitive slaves

who seek their protection. You have entreated the slave masters to accept these moderate offers; and, after long and patient waiting, you, as commander-in-chief in the army, have appointed to-morrow, the first of January, 1863, as the day of unconditional freedom for the slaves of the rebel States. Heartily do we congratulate you and your country on this humane and righteous course.

“We assume that you cannot now stop short of a complete uprooting of slavery. It would not become us to dictate any details, but there are broad principles of humanity which must guide you. If complete emancipation in some States be deferred, though only to a predetermined day, still, in the interval, human beings should not be counted chattels. Women must have rights of chastity and maternity, men the rights of husbands; masters the liberty of manumission. Justice demands for the black, no less than for the white, the protection of the law—that his voice may be heard in your courts. Nor must any such abomination be tolerated as slave-breeding States and a slave market—if you are to earn the high reward of all your services in the approval of the universal brotherhood and of the Divine Father. It is for your free country to decide whether anything but immediate and total emancipation can secure the most indispensable rights of humanity, against the inveterate wickedness of local laws and local executives.

“We implore you, for your own honor and welcome, not to faint in your providential mis-

sion. While your enthusiasm is aflame, and the tide of events runs high, let the work be finished effectually. Leave no root of bitterness to spring up and work fresh misery to your children. It is a mighty task, indeed, to reorganize the industry, not only of four millions of the colored race, but of five millions of whites. Nevertheless, the vast progress you have made in the short space of twenty months fills us with hope that every stain on your freedom will shortly be removed, and that the erasure of that foul blot upon civilization and Christianity—chattel slavery—during your Presidency, will cause the name of Abraham Lincoln to be honored and revered by posterity. We are certain that such a glorious consummation will cement Great Britain to the United States in close and enduring regards. Our interests, moreover, are identified with yours. We are truly one people, though locally separate. And if you have any ill wishes here, be assured that they are chiefly those who oppose liberty at home, and that they will be powerless to stir up quarrels between us, from the very day in which your country becomes, undeniably and without exception, the home of the free.

“Accept our high admiration of your firmness in upholding the proclamation of freedom.”

On February 2, 1863, Lincoln sent the following letter in answer to the address of the London workingmen:

“To the workingmen of London: I have received the New Year’s address which you have

sent me, with a sincere appreciation of the exalted and humane sentiments by which it was inspired.

"As these sentiments are manifestly the enduring support of the free institutions of England, so I am sure also that they constitute the only reliable basis for free institutions throughout the world.

"The resources, advantages and powers of the American people are very great, and they have consequently succeeded to equally great responsibilities. It seems to have developed upon them to test whether a government established on the principles of human freedom can be maintained against an effort to build one upon the exclusive foundation of human bondage. They will rejoice with me in the new evidences which your proceedings furnish that the magnanimity they are exhibiting is justly estimated by the true friends of freedom and humanity in foreign countries.

"Accept my best wishes for your individual welfare, and for the welfare and happiness of the whole British people."

Abraham Lincoln."*

Previous to this, on January 19th, President Lincoln had sent a more comprehensive reply to the address of the workingmen of Manchester. This reply read as follows:

**Senate Documents.* Third Session, 37th Congress, 1862-1863.

“Washington, January 19, 1863.

“To the Workingmen of Manchester, England:

“I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the address and resolutions which you sent me on the eve of the new year. When I came, on the 4th of March, 1861, through a free and constitutional election to preside in the Government of the United States, the country was found at the verge of civil war. Whatever might have been the cause or whoseever the fault, one duty, paramount to all others, was before me, namely, to maintain and preserve at once the Constitution and the integrity of the Federal Republic. A conscientious purpose to perform this duty is the key to all measures of administration which have been and to all which will hereafter be pursued. Under our frame of Government and my official oath, I could not depart from this purpose if I would. It is not always in the power of government to enlarge or restrict the scope of moral results which follow the policies that they may deem it necessary for the public safety from time to time to adopt. I have understood well that the duty of self-preservation rests solely with the American people; but I have at the same time been aware that favor or disfavor of foreign nations might have a material influence in enlarging or prolonging the struggle with disloyal men in which the country is engaged. A fair examination of history has served to authorize a belief that the past actions and influences of the United States were generally regarded as hav-

ing been beneficial toward mankind. I have, therefore, reckoned upon the forbearance of nations. Circumstances to which you kindly allude induce me especially to expect that if justice and good faith should be practiced by the United States, they would encounter no hostile influence on the part of Great Britain. It is now a pleasant duty to acknowledge the demonstration you have given of your desire that a spirit of amity and peace toward this country may prevail in the councils of your Queen, who is respected and esteemed in your own country only more than she is by the kindred nation which has its home on this side of the Atlantic. I know and deeply deplore the sufferings which the workingmen at Manchester, and in all Europe, are called to endure in this crisis. It has been often and studiously represented that the attempt to overthrow this Government, which was built upon the foundation of human rights, and to substitute for it one which should rest exclusively on the basis of human slavery, was likely to obtain the favor of Europe. Through the action of our disloyal citizens, the workingmen of Europe have been subjected to severe trials, for the purpose of forcing their sanction to that attempt. Under the circumstances, I cannot but regard your decisive utterances upon the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country. It is indeed an energetic and reinspiring assurance of the inherent power of truth, and of the ultimate and universal triumph of justice, hu-

manity and freedom. I do not doubt that the sentiments you have expressed will be sustained by your great nation; and, on the other hand, I have no hesitation in assuring you that they will excite admiration, esteem and the most reciprocal feelings of friendship among the American people. I hail this interchange of sentiment, therefore, as an augury that whatever else may happen, whatever misfortune may befall your country or my own, the peace and friendship which now exists between the two nations will be, as it shall be my desire to make them, perpetual.

Abraham Lincoln.**

On the 26th of February the Senate adopted a resolution† requesting that the correspondence between President Lincoln and the Workingmen of England be laid before it. This was done, and on March 2d the Senate ordered it sent to the printer and incorporated in the Senate Documents.**

President Lincoln's letter to the workingmen of Manchester recognizes the sacrifices which the workingmen of England made in behalf of the Union, and mentions the sublime heroism shown by them, "unsurpassed in any age or land." The polite phrases in regard to the persons at the head of the English Government were probably inserted for diplo-

**Senate Documents.* 1863.

†*Congressional Globe.* February 26, 1863.

***Senate Documents.* Third Session, 37th Congress, 1862-63.

matic reasons. It was really the English working class *alone* that merited the gratitude of the Union.

3. LINCOLN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE WORKING CLASS.

Next to Washington, of all the Presidents, Lincoln ranks highest in the esteem of the American people. It is not only his relation to Negro emancipation and his tragic death that have made him the national hero of this country. Mythical tradition also has so glorified him that he is now celebrated for views which he did not hold.

Mythical tradition has especially transfigured Lincoln's attitude towards the working class. He has been credited with prophetic expressions favoring the inference that he foresaw the dominion of capitalist corporations and entertained the fear that all wealth would become concentrated in a few hands, to the great peril of the Republic. Utterances have been ascribed to him counselling the working class to guard well the political rights which they possess and not to allow such rights to be wrested from them. He is even said to have had the economic wisdom to declare that every government should strive to secure for every workingman, as far as possible, the entire product of his labor. In short, Lincoln was represented as a man who had excogitated for himself a clear view of the economic evolution of society, alike in the present and the future, who distinctly recognized the part which the working class would play in this evolution, whose sympathies were entirely with the working class, and who raised a warning voice

against the "money power."

Lincoln did not possess this knowledge of economic evolution; he had no idea of the historic part the working class is called to play; he had no idea even of the special significance of the labor movement, and his sympathies were not with the workingmen, in so far as they voiced the demands of a separate class. Lincoln has been extolled as a friend of the workingmen, as almost a Socialist, the Socialist press of the United States even joining in the chorus of praise. This praise has been possible only because sentiments have been ascribed to him which he never uttered, and because certain expressions used by him have been distorted or falsified into their direct opposite.*

*An ingenious fabrication of utterances on labor purporting to be Lincoln's has been printed and circulated by the thousand in every part of the United States. It consists of five paragraphs, the last four of which are more or less genuine, but are distorted out of their meaning. The first paragraph begins, "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me." The whole fabrication was analyzed by W. J. Ghent in *Collier's Weekly* for April 1, 1905. Of the first paragraph Mr. Ghent writes:

"[it] is almost certainly a forgery. The style is not Lincoln's, nor in so far as any one can now say, are the sentiments. Nowhere among his authenticated utterances is there to be found anything resembling either the form or the substance of this paragraph. No one has ever been able to show the original in Lincoln's hand, and repeated demands for its production have met only vague assertions of its existence in some other and generally remote place."

Apart from his sentiments in regard to slavery, there are but few among Lincoln's numerous spoken and written utterances which deal with the labor question. In none of these utterances did he declare himself in favor of the working class and its special demands as antagonistic to the other classes of the population. On the contrary, he always avoided recognizing such antagonisms. At Cincinnati, on February 12, 1861, he addressed a meeting of German workingmen. When the chairman declared it as the sense of those present that the working class must be the foundation of all government, Lincoln cautiously remarked:

"I agree with you, Mr. Chairman, that the workingmen are the basis of all government, for the plain reason that they are the more numerous, and as you added, that those were the sentiments of the gentlemen present, representing not only the working class, but citizens of other callings than those of the mechanic, I am happy to concur with you in these sentiments."

Even before this, in March, 1860, Lincoln had expressed himself in regard to the labor movement. The campaign had taken him to New England, where the struggles of the workingmen presented themselves to him more forcibly than elsewhere. In Massachusetts there was in progress a strike of the shoemakers which Senator Douglas had represented as a consequence "of this unfortunate sectional warfare" between the North and the South. In a speech at Hartford, Conn., on March 5, 1860, Lincoln challenged the ridicu-

lous statement of Douglas, saying he "thanked God that we have a system of labor where there can be a strike. Whatever the pressure, there is a point where the workingman may stop." Here, too, Lincoln added cautiously that he did not pretend to be familiar with the subject of the shoe strike. "If you give up your convictions and call slavery right, as they do, you let slavery in upon you—instead of white laborers who can strike, you'll soon have black laborers who can't strike."*

In a speech at New Haven, Conn., on the following day, Lincoln returned to the subject, saying:

"I am glad to see that a system of labor prevails in New England under which laborers can strike when they want to, where they are not obliged to work under all circumstances, and are not tied down and obliged to labor whether you pay them or not. I like the system which lets a man quit when he wants to, and wish it might prevail everywhere. One of the reasons why I am opposed to slavery is just here. What is the true condition of the laborer? I take it that it is the best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can. Some will get wealthy. I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich; it would do more harm than good. So while we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get

*J. G. Nicolay and J. Hay: *Abraham Lincoln, I.*, pp. 615-616.

rich with everybody else. When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition—he knows that there is no fixed condition of labor for his whole life. I am not ashamed to confess that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flatboat—just what might happen to any poor man's son. I want every man to have his chance—and I believe a black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition—when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterward, and finally hire men to work for him. That is the true system.”*

One may gather from this speech that Lincoln regarded the strike as a rightful weapon in the struggles of the workingmen, but the cautious reserve with which he discusses the matter leaves uncertain his attitude towards labor organizations and particularly towards trade unions.

The two speeches merely show that Lincoln preferred the system of “free labor” to the system of slave labor. For the rest, it is to be seen from his observations that he had no comprehension of the aims and ends of the labor movement or of the special interests of the working class. The labor movement was to him a phenomenon for which he had no understanding and to which he probably never paid any particular attention.

After his election to the Presidency, Lincoln

*Nicolay and Hay, I., pp. 625-626.

discussed the question of capital and labor more thoroughly in his message to Congress of December, 1861. He took the same position in this document which he had set forth in his speeches in Hartford and New Haven, and even earlier in an address at Milwaukee, and defended it in almost the same language. This message precisely defined Lincoln's position in relation to economic questions, and it must never be left out of consideration if one wishes to form a true view of the opinions of the man in regard to these matters.

Later, in the year preceding his death, Lincoln made special reference to the propositions in this message, as to a sort of programme to be submitted to workingmen for their consideration, thereby making it plain that he never discarded the views there laid down.

In New York, in 1863, a workingmen's organization had been formed under the name of the Republican Workingmen's Association of New York. This association resolved to make President Lincoln an honorary member. A committee was appointed and sent to Washington for the purpose of apprising the President of his election to an honorary membership in the association and of submitting to him an address. Lincoln received this committee on March 21, 1864, and addressed them as follows:

"Gentlemen of the Committee: The honorary membership in your association, as generously tendered, is gratefully accepted.

"You comprehend, as your address shows,

that the existing rebellion means more, and tends to more, than the perpetuation of African slavery—that it is, in fact, a war upon the rights of all working people. Partly to show that this view has not escaped my attention, and partly that I cannot better express myself, I read a passage from the message to Congress in December, 1861:

“It continues to develop that the insurrection is largely, if not exclusively, a war upon the first principle of popular government—the rights of the people. Conclusive evidence of this is found in the most grave and maturely considered public documents as well as in the general tone of the insurgents. In those documents we find the abridgement of the existing right of suffrage, and the denial to the people of all right to participate in the selection of public officers, except the legislative, boldly advocated, with labored arguments to prove that large control of the people in government is the source of all political evil. Monarchy itself is sometimes hinted at as a possible refuge from the power of the people.

“In my present position I could scarcely be justified were I to omit raising a warning voice against this approach of returning despotism.

“It is not needed, nor fitting here, that a general argument should be made in favor of popular institutions; but there is one point, with its connections, not so hackneyed as most others, to which I ask a brief attention, It is the effort, to place *capital* on an equal footing with, if not above, *labor*, in the structure of government. It is assumed that labor is avail-

able only in connection with capital, that nobody labors unless somebody else, owning capital, somehow by the use of it induces him to labor. This assumed, it is next considered whether it is best, that capital shall *hire* laborers and thus induce them to work by their own consent, or *buy* them and drive them to it without their consent. Having proceeded so far, it is naturally concluded that all laborers are either *hired* laborers or what we call slaves, and, further, it is assumed that whoever is once a hired laborer, is fixed in that condition for life.

“‘Now, there is no such relation between capital and labor as assumed; nor is there any such thing as a free man being fixed for life in the condition of a hired laborer. Both these assumptions are false, and all inferences from them are groundless.

“‘Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration. Capital has its rights, which are as worthy of protection as any other rights. Nor is it denied that there is, and probably always will be, a relation between capital and labor, producing mutual benefits. The error is in assuming that the whole labor of the community exists within that relation. A few men own capital, and that few avoid labor themselves, and, with their capital, hire or buy another few to labor for them. A large majority belong to neither class—neither work for others, nor have others

working for them. In most of the Southern States a majority of the whole people, of all colors, are neither slaves nor masters; while in the Northern, a large majority are neither hirers nor hired. Men with their families—wives, sons, and daughters—work for themselves, on their farms, in their houses, and in their shops, taking the whole product to themselves, and asking no favors of capital on the one hand, nor of hired laborers or slaves on the other. It is not forgotten that a considerable number of persons mingle their own labor with capital, that is: they labor with their own hands, and also buy or hire others to labor for them, but this is only a mixed and not a distinct class. No principle stated is disturbed by the existence of the mixed class.

“‘Again, as has already been said, there is not, of necessity, any such thing as the free hired laborer being fixed to that condition for life. Many independent men everywhere in those States, a few years back in their lives, were hired laborers. The prudent penniless beginner in the world labors for wages a while, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just and generous and prosperous system, which opens the way to all—gives hope to all and consequent energy and progress and improvement of condition to all. No men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty—none less inclined to take or touch that which they have not honestly earned.

Let them beware of surrendering a political power which they already possess, and which, if surrendered, will surely be used to close the door of advancement against such as they, and to fix new disabilities and burdens upon them, till all of liberty shall be lost.'

"The views then expressed remain unchanged, nor have I much to add. None are so deeply interested to resist the present rebellion as the working people. Let them beware of prejudice, working division and hostility among themselves. The most notable feature of a disturbance in your city last summer was the hanging of some working people by other working people. It should never be so. The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations, and tongues, and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property, or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."*

It is evident from this address that Lincoln considered himself as belonging to the lower middle-class (petty bourgeoisie) and that he

*Nicolay and Hay, pp. 501-502.

was imbued by its ideals. Nothing is more natural, considering the state of social evolution in America at that time and Lincoln's individual development. Lincoln denies the existence of an industrial proletariat, "fixed to that condition for life." In the light of his lower middle-class experiences and ideals he still saw for every one the possibility of advancement from wage worker to proprietor. His observations are a glorification of the lower middle-class, the men who are neither capitalists nor wage workers. The former wage worker who advances by his own efforts and then hires another beginner as a wage worker, thus becoming a small employer—such is Lincoln's ideal. That is to him "the just and generous and prosperous system." He warns this stratum of the population, who "toil up from poverty," to beware of surrendering their political rights and their political power. It is not the workingmen whom Lincoln counsels to vigilance over their political rights, but the lower middle-class. And whoever might still entertain the slightest doubt concerning Lincoln's position among the classes constituting society, and the distance by which he was still separated from the Socialist point of view, will be set right by the close of his address to the New York labor committee, by his glorification of property and its owners, and by his warning to workingmen not to "make war upon property." If he was at all aware of Socialist views and had formed an opinion concerning them, it must have been a hostile one. This was quite natural. The labor question

and its implications were foreign to him. He represented the farmer and the lower middle-class with whom his strength lay, and who at that period constituted the most powerful stratum of the population of the Northern States of the Union.

The passage in Lincoln's address to the New York labor committee, "the strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations and tongues and kindreds" has led some to conclude that its author must have had an understanding of the international solidarity of the working class and of the special class solidarity which is peculiar to the labor movement on a higher plane. It is possible that the heroic attitude in favor of the Union assumed by the working class of England during the war had awakened in him a slight understanding of the class solidarity of workingmen, but it is not probable, and we must consider that beautiful passage as a mere mode of expression without any deeper significance. If one were to draw inferences from a single passage of this kind as to Lincoln's general way of thinking in regard to the labor movement, one would have to concede the right of other classes to derive precisely contrary conclusions from his remarks in the speech at New Haven: "I take it that it is the best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can," and "I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich."

But there is still another document on the strength of which a claim has been made for

Lincoln's approach to Socialism. In 1847 Lincoln had outlined a speech on the protective tariff and free trade which he intended to deliver in Congress. In this outline occur the following statements:

"In the early days of our race the Almighty said to the first of our race, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' and since then, if we except the light and the air of heaven, no good thing has been or can be enjoyed by us without having first cost labor. And inasmuch as most good things are produced by labor, it follows that all such things of right belong to those whose labor has produced them. But it has so happened, in all ages of the world, that some have labored, and others have without labor enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To secure to each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a worthy object of any good government.

"But when the question arises, how can a government best effect this? In our own country, in its present condition, will the protective principle advance or retard this object? Upon this subject the habits of our whole species fall into three great classes—useful labor, useless labor and idleness. Of these, the first only is meritorious, and to it all the products of labor rightfully belong; but the two latter, while they exist, are heavy pensioners upon the first, robbing it of a large portion of its just rights. The only remedy for this is to, so far as possible, drive useless labor and idleness out of existence. And, first, as to

useless labor. Before making war upon this we must learn to distinguish it from useful. It appears to me that all labor done directly and indirectly in carrying articles to the place of consumption, which could have been produced in sufficient abundance, with as little labor, at the place of consumption as at the place they were carried from, is useless labor.”*

On the basis of these considerations Lincoln attempted to demonstrate that it would be useful labor to inaugurate and develop in the South, where cotton is indigenous, the cotton spinning and weaving industry. To this end he demanded the maintenance of the protective tariff.

He writes literally:

“I try to show that the abandonment of the protective policy by the American Government must result in the increase of both useless labor and idleness, and so, in proportion, must produce want and ruin among the people.”

Considered out of their context, Lincoln’s introductory remarks in this outline might produce the impression that he indeed inclined towards certain Socialist views according to which the product of labor should belong to him who created it. It is even not impossible that Lincoln, at the high tide of the Fourierist movement, at the time when he wrote his outline, had become acquainted with newspapers and pamphlets containing similar propositions

*Nicolay and Hay, I., p. 92 ff.

and that he drew his inspiration from these. It is certain that he was a reader of Greely's *Tribune*. But in the connection where we find it, the sentence "to secure to each laborer the whole product of his labor, or as nearly as possible, is a worthy object of any good government," cannot mean that the *wage worker* is to receive the product of his labor. That labor alone produces values was by no means clear to Lincoln. In his view the manufacturer who exploited a number of men was also doing useful work, and he, too, was therefore entitled to the product of his labor. The transport of merchandise he did not consider as useful labor, and the workingmen engaged in the transportation of merchandise were therefore not entitled to a share of the product. Lincoln's Socialist-sounding phrases of 1847 by no means bore a Socialist meaning; they could not bear such a meaning because their author had no conception of the working class as a well-defined stratum of the population, with economic interests of its own and with definite historical aims.

Abraham Lincoln was not a Socialist, nor was he particularly friendly to workingmen as the components of a class. The ideas of the modern working-class movement were to him foreign ideas and remained so even in his later years. He stood on the ground of the lower middle-class and the farmer element, to which he himself belonged. He was a man of his age, with whose ideas he was imbued. He was not a man of the future, and he knew nothing of the ideas of the future. And the ideas which

have been developed by the labor movement were to him the ideas of a future time.

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